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***Documentary Analysis***

# Zhou, Mao, and Nixon's 1972 Conversations on India

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*This research note uses the recently declassified U.S. documents of President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger's conversations with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Chairman Mao Zedong to reconstruct an episode during the Cold War. The goal is to explain not just what Mao and Zhou thought of India and South Asia in the early 1970s but also how their understanding and expressions were conditioned by the geostrategic environment at the time. A critical content analysis of these transcripts reveals much that is useful for policymakers today in Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi as they fashion their policy responses to the security challenges of the early twenty-first century. In his first meeting with Kissinger in July 1971, Zhou described the South Asian subcontinent as a prime area of "turmoil under heaven"—this remains the case thirty years later with the ongoing War on Terrorism and the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff. A look at the historical origins of the great power triangular diplomacy in the early 1970s—the Washington-Beijing quasi-alliance to counter the Soviet threat—is timely and useful in a period when the United States is seen as engaged in triangular diplomacy of a different kind in the early twenty-first century—the Washington-New Delhi quasi-alliance to counter the perceived China threat. This research note*

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*focuses primarily on Chinese views and perceptions of India and South Asia, seeking to derive the roots of current Chinese policy toward India and to provide policy-relevant analysis as to how past events and perceptions may affect present and future developments in Sino-Indian relations in three areas: mutual suspicion and distrust, the unresolved border conflict, and the Sino-U.S.-Indian triangular relationship.*

KEYWORDS: **China-India relations; U.S.-India relations; Cold War; South Asia; Chinese foreign policy.**

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The visit of U.S. President Richard Nixon to China from February 21-28, 1972 was—as Nixon himself later opined—"the week that changed the world."[1] This was the first visit by an American president to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Nixon was instrumental in opening up a new political relationship between the United States and Communist China after decades of mutual estrangement, hostility, and conflict. The highlight of Nixon's visit was his meeting with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chairman Mao Zedong (毛澤東), yet he also held substantive discussions on international security issues in a series of conversations with Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩來). Moreover, a preliminary round of discussions between Zhou Enlai and Nixon's then National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, had taken place six months earlier, during the latter's secret visit to Beijing in July 1971 which paved the way for Nixon's historic visit.[2]

These conversations, classified as "Top Secret" up until recently, have had great bearing on subsequent events over the last three decades in the world in general and in South Asia in particular. Fortunately, the records of Nixon and Kissinger's conversations with Zhou and Mao have now been

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[1]Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 559.

[2]For the Kissinger-Zhou talks in July 1971, see William Burr, ed., *Henry Kissinger's Secret Trip to China: The Beijing-Washington Back-Channel September 1970-July 1971* (National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 66, February 27, 2002), available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/>.

made available online at the National Security Archives of George Washington University website following a mandatory declassification review request made by the National Security Archive in 1994.[3] Important excisions notwithstanding,[4] these documents go well beyond the accounts of the talks that Nixon and Kissinger both provided in their respective memoirs which, while focusing on the Vietnam War and the Soviet threat, did not reveal much on the India-Pakistan-China triangular relationship.[5]

In his first meeting with Kissinger in July 1971, Zhou described the South Asian subcontinent as a prime area of "turmoil under heaven"[6] and this remains the case thirty years later with the ongoing War on Terrorism and the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff. This article therefore focuses primarily on Nixon and Kissinger's conversations with Zhou Enlai dealing with South Asia in general and Sino-U.S. perspectives on India in particular. A critical content analysis of these never-before-published documents—a total of seven verbatim documents on the Nixon-Zhou talks of February 1972 and forty-one documents on the Beijing-Washington Back-Channel and Kissinger's secret trip to China in 1971—reveals much that is useful for policymakers in Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi as they fashion their policy responses to the security challenges of the early twenty-first century.

First and foremost, these documents fill in major gaps in the existing literature on Chinese views of India as well as on Washington's triangular diplomacy with Beijing and Moscow. They reveal, for instance, the Nixon administration's secret attempt to create a "tacit alliance" with China while

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[3]For Nixon-Zhou talks in February 1972, see <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/nixzhou/index.html>.

[4]Significant excisions appear in the Nixon-Zhou discussions of India, the former Soviet Union, Japan, and Taiwan, demonstrating that even today some of the information is regarded as sensitive by U.S. government agencies.

[5]Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 559-80; and Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (New York: Little Brown, 1979), 1049-96.

[6]Kissinger's memorandum on "My Talks with Chou En-lai" to Nixon of July 14, 1971, Document 40:19-20, available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-40.pdf>.

deceiving the Soviets about the relationship.[7] These documents also reveal the American motives and attempts to use the 1971 India-Pakistan War to build their strategic alliance with China, as well as Chinese objectives and dilemmas at that time. A look at the historical origins of the great power triangular diplomacy—the Washington-Beijing quasi-alliance to counter the Soviet threat—in the early 1970s is timely and useful at a time when the United States is seen as engaged in triangular diplomacy of a different kind—the Washington-New Delhi quasi-alliance to counter the perceived China threat—in the early twenty-first century. In addition, any long-term assessment of bilateral ties must be based on a sound understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of the past.

Secondly, these transcripts provide scintillating details on the personalities of leaders like Khrushchev, Mao, Nehru, Nixon, Kissinger, Indira Gandhi, and Yahya Khan. Some of the transcript conversations would not only irritate or disappoint the Indians, Pakistanis, Japanese, and Russians today but could also prove embarrassing to the Chinese and the Americans themselves.[8] They provide first-hand accounts of their personal likes and dislikes as well as biases and prejudices that helped shape interstate relations and Asian geopolitics during the Cold War era. The nature of leaders' conversations was in essence an exercise in impression formation and mutual manipulations, rather than a frank all-revealing exchange of views between the parties.

These documents also clearly demonstrate the role that domestic

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[7]William Burr's book, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, shows that Kissinger was very careful about what he included and excluded in his memoirs of the Nixon years in his *White House Years* (1979) and *Years of Upheaval* (1982). "The biggest omission is the extraordinary degree to which Nixon and Kissinger tilted U.S. policy towards China, to the point of offering the Chinese sensitive intelligence information on Soviet military deployments, in their effort to cement a 'tacit' alliance against the Soviet Union." For details, see William Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow: A National Security Archive Document Reader* (New York: The New Press, 1999).

[8]Flattery and disparaging comments about Soviet and other Asian leaders are one common characteristic. For example, the Nixon-Zhou conversation is peppered with scorn and contempt for the then Soviet ambassador to the United Nations, Jacob Malik (see <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/nixzhou/12-01.htm> [hereafter, Document 2], 18-19.

politics plays in interstate negotiations. The documents show how the State Department officials were kept out of the decision-making process by a determined Nixon-Kissinger duo in the early 1970s, revealing the consequences this had on U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union and South Asia. In the course of their conversations, both leaders repeatedly emphasized the need for the utmost confidentiality and secrecy regarding talks on the Soviet Union, India, and Japan—with Nixon's warning that his own State Department "leaks like a sieve."[9] Interestingly, Nixon seemed to be criticizing the democratic process for its inability to keep secrets while lauding the communist system. While Nixon took great delight in taking a dig at his domestic political opponents (both Republican and Democrat) in his private conversations with Zhou, the Chinese Premier, true to form, did not utter a single word about the deteriorating health of Chairman Mao, the domestic political situation (e.g., the fall of Lin Biao [林彪]), or the intense power struggle that was going on in the faction-ridden CCP at that time.

Furthermore, the transcripts demonstrate how the mutual and intra-deception/misperception between the United States and China and between the Soviet Union and India contributed to miscalculation and, in turn, led to a security dilemma. Last but not least, these transcripts serve as a useful reminder of the games great powers play, more often than not, at the expense of small and weak states in the international system.

A critical examination of the Zhou-Nixon transcripts reveals two major reasons for the Chinese and American distrust and dislike for India during the Cold War: New Delhi's close ties with the Soviet Union and Beijing's alliance with Pakistan, especially Islamabad's pivotal role in putting Chinese leaders in touch with the Americans. This documentary analysis argues that, as in the past, China's alliance relationship with Pakistan and Beijing's security concerns vis-à-vis India—coupled with territorial disputes and the need to protect its "soft strategic underbelly," Tibet—continue to determine Beijing's South Asia policy in general and its

[9]Document 2:3. Obviously, Nixon was lamenting as much about bureaucratic politics as about the fact that the State Department then, as now, has a liberal composition and bias.

India policy in particular. The argument is also that significant improvement in bilateral relations notwithstanding, mutual distrust and suspicion still continue to shape the perceptions and influence the policies of China and India.

This paper is composed of six parts. The first section provides a brief historical background to outline the broader international and domestic contexts in which Zhou's conversations with Nixon took place. Since perceptions, biases, and worldviews play an important role in shaping interstate relations and conflict behavior, the Chinese leaders' views and images of India and the Delhi leadership are the focus of section two, which essentially sets the scene for section three's critical examination of Zhou's views on the origins of the 1962 war and territorial dispute—both of which continue to bedevil China-India bilateral relationship. This is followed by a discussion of Chinese and American perspectives on the 1971 India-Pakistan War in section four. It was this war that not only helped facilitate and hasten the Sino-U.S. rapprochement but also laid the foundation of the Sino-U.S.-Indian triangular relationship (section five) which has had a major influence on the Asian security environment. The last part of the paper offers a critical analysis of changes and continuities in the post-Cold War relations among Beijing, Washington, and New Delhi, as well as the Sino-Indian geopolitical rivalry. The argument is that while significant changes have taken place in Sino-U.S. relations, China's relationship with India, in contrast, is characterized more by continuities than changes, with the past continuing to exercise strong influence on China's present and future policy toward India.

Given that U.S. documentation provides only a partial and somewhat biased record of a more complex reality, other important sources have been used in the argumentation of this paper. Other useful sources that further illustrate, illuminate, reinforce, and/or provide an objective analysis of some of the issues discussed here are William Burr's *The Kissinger Transcripts* (1999), Raymond Garthoff's *Détente and Confrontation* (1994), Y. Vertzberger, *Misperceptions in Foreign Policymaking* (1984), John Garver's recent study on *Protracted Contest: India-China Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (2001), and Steven Hoffman's *India and the China*

*Crisis* (1990).[10]

## The Historical Context

Before subjecting Nixon's conversations with his Chinese interlocutors to critical scrutiny, important is to keep in mind the international and domestic political contexts and the motives, interests, and aspirations of key actors involved in order to understand the full import of the Nixon-Zhou talks held in Beijing in February of 1972. This visit took place two months after the India-Pakistan War of 1971, which led to both the dismemberment of Pakistan (an ally of both the United States and China, and more importantly, a facilitator of the Sino-U.S. rapprochement)[11] and the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state (with the help of India backed by the Soviet Union). Natural, therefore, was that the two sides spent a considerable amount of time discussing the new security situation in South Asia and the need to coordinate their future responses. That is why five out of seven documents on the Nixon-Zhou talks held in February 1972 deal with India and South Asia. In sharp contrast, only three (nos. 35, 36, and 40) out of a total of forty-one documents deal with India and South Asia during Kissinger's talks with Zhou in July 1971.[12] This was also the time when the Vietnam War was at its peak—despite the Nixon administration's plans to bring a negotiated settlement. The Soviet

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[10]Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 59-65; Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994), esp. chap. 8: "Triangular Diplomacy and Regional Conflict: The Indo-Pakistani War, 1971," 295-322; John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: India-China Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001); and Steven A. Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1990). The "cultural wall" and Chinese Sino-centric arrogance and its consequences are discussed in Y. I. Vertzberger, *Misperceptions in Foreign Policymaking: The Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984).

[11]For Pakistan's role in facilitating the Sino-U.S. rapprochement, see F. S. Aijazuddin, *From a Head, Through a Head, To a Head: The Secret Channel Between the U.S. and China through Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[12]In October 1971, there was hardly any discussion on the India-Pakistan situation despite the threat of a looming war.

Union was seen as a rising, expansionist power, lending its military and diplomatic support to allies such as India and Vietnam. On top of it all, the Nixon-Zhou meeting was preceded by a tense stand-off between China and the Soviet Union following both several bloody skirmishes on their disputed border and the Soviet threat to take out China's nuclear arsenal in a preemptive strike. The domestic situation in China was volatile, with the turmoil and chaos unleased by the Cultural Revolution having brought economic and social development to a standstill. The power struggle between moderate and radical factions of the CCP was still raging, and the central leadership was badly shaken by the fallout of the purges of Lin Biao's associates within the defense establishment.

## Nixon, Mao, and Zhou Assess India

Kissinger had informed Nixon about the "Chinese detestation of the Indians" and China's "historical distrust of India" after his first meeting with Zhou Enlai in July 1971.[13] By the time he visited China in February 1972, Nixon had also developed a personal dislike for India, and particularly Prime Minister Indira Gandhi because of her open defiance of the American will during the December 1971 India-Pakistan War which resulted in Pakistan's dismemberment. Document 4 of the Nixon-Zhou transcripts—which also happens to be one of the more heavily excised documents—further confirms this. Among the excisions is an aspersion by Nixon against the Indians.[14] Comparing the Germans, the Japanese, and the Chinese (who, in Nixon's view, had the qualities of drive and hard work), Nixon made derogatory remarks about the Indians' breeding habits, laziness, and their lack of sense of purpose and determination. Not sur-

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[13]Kissinger's memorandum on "My Talks with Chou En-lai" to Nixon of July 14, 1971, Document 40:9-20, 22, at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-40.pdf>; and Kissinger, *White House Years*, 914, 848-49.

[14]See <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/nixzhou/14-01.htm> [hereafter, Document 4], 28.

prisingly, the rest of the statement is censored. Nixon opined that "the money goes down a rat-hole in countries like India," and regretted that "the more aid we have given, the less influence we have." Zhou echoed Nixon: "And India actually is a bottomless hole."[15] This point about the futility of U.S. economic assistance to India was also taken up by Mao Zedong in his conversations with Nixon and Kissinger, and was reproduced in *The Kissinger Transcripts*.

That Nixon and Zhou were also largely ignorant of Indian history is evident from the following remarks. Nixon said: "As I look at India's brief history, *it has had enough trouble trying to digest West Bengal*. If now it tries to digest East Bengal, it may cause indigestion which would be massive." His host, Zhou Enlai, concurred:

> That's bound to be so. It is also a great pity that the daughter [Mrs. Gandhi] has also taken as her legacy the philosophy of her father embodied in the book *Discovery of India*. Have your read it?... Yes, he [Nehru] was thinking of a great Indian empire—Malaysia, Ceylone, etc. It would probably also include our Tibet.... Chen Yi [陳毅] called it to my attention. He said it was precisely the spirit of India that was embodied in the book.[16]

If Zhou found Nehruvian interpretation of Indian history so difficult to digest, one wonders what he would have made of the ultra-nationalist view of India's history (which is, in many respects, similar to the CCP's own view of Chinese history), propounded by the *Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and its political wing, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which looks toward restoring India's glorious past as a civilization and a great world power.[17] It was not a mere coincidence that Sino-Indian relations deteriorated sharply soon after the BJP-led coalition came to power in March 1998, labeled China as "potential enemy number one," tested nu-

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[15]See <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/nixzhou/13-01.htm> [hereafter, Document 3], 10.

[16]Ibid. Italics added.

[17]At the height of the polemics in 1962, after China had attacked Indian frontier posts in proclaimed self-defense, the Chinese government issued a statement claiming that the "goal pursued by this ambitious Nehru is the establishment of a great empire unprecedented in India's history." Government of the People's Republic of China, *The Sino-Indian Boundary Question* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 39.

clear weapons, and signaled its intention to engage China in tit-for-tat diplomacy.[18]

Furthermore, Zhou is reported as having said that "*the* biggest challenge after the Second World War was the liberation of China."[19] From the perspective of Chinese nationalists, the independence of India or Indonesia from colonial rule was largely a non-event. This was not surprising because Chairman Mao harbored doubts about India's independent status *more than two decades after the British had left.* Mao told Kissinger on November 12, 1973: "India did not win independence. If it does not attach itself with Britain, it attaches itself to the Soviet Union. And now, more than one-half of their economy depends on you (the United States)."[20] For the Mao-Zhou duo, Nehru was first a British and then a Soviet stooge, incapable of acting on his own and India was first a British colony and later a Soviet colony.[21] Mao and Kissinger also used to make light of Gandhi and Indian philosophy which "was never meant to have a practical application." As will be shown below, Nixon was a self-confessed "hard-liner on India" and took credit for all the anti-India decisions during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War. In other words, it was a complete meeting of the minds among known India-baiters at the time. Nixon later summed up Chinese attitudes toward their neighbors: "The Russians they hate, the Japanese they fear and as for the Indians, they feel contempt."[22] Interestingly, John Garver's *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* draws attention to a 1974 poem by Mao which gave a clear, if poetic, description of the scorn with which he viewed India's aspirations for greatness. In this poem, which outlined Mao's worldview at the time, Mao described the United States as the tiger, Britain as the lion, the Soviet Union as the bear, the Islamic countries as the moon, the rich West as the sun, and

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[18]J. Mohan Malik, "India-China Relations in the 21st Century," in *Securing India's Future in the New Millennium*, ed. Brahma Chellaney (New Delhi/London: Orient Longman, 1999), 337-91; and Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 343-89.

[19]Document 2:17. Italics added.

[20]Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 195-96.

[21]Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 113.

[22]Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 42-43.

India as a cow. A cow, moreover, is "only food or for people to ride and for pulling carts; it has no particular talents. The cow would starve to death if its master did not give it grass to eat... Even though this cow may have great ambitions, they are futile."[23]

Zhou's discussion with Nixon suggests that Zhou did not view India as a fully sovereign nation but as a satellite state with imperial ambitions. Interestingly, in the course of conversation, Zhou went on to make an important point about India's inability to exercise hegemony:

> From our point of view, even if the subcontinent were under one country there would still be turmoil there, because they have nationality problems there even more complicated than yours [U.S.A.] which are now covered up. If India took over all of the subcontinent, there would be even more trouble. *India is not able to exercise hegemony—this is our philosophy.*[24]

This view contrasted sharply with official China's frequent warnings about India's hegemonic designs since the early 1960s. In their bilateral meetings with smaller South Asian countries, Chinese leaders and policymakers have long bemoaned India's "hegemonic aspirations" and "big brotherly attitude" especially when contrasted with China's "peace-loving, brotherly, and good-neighborly attitude."[25] As will be shown later, on the one hand, this disparity reflects the uncertain and contradictory nature of China's India policy, and on the other, demonstrates that debate within the Chinese policymaking community about India's future capabilities and intentions and the challenges for China is far from over.[26]

## Territorial Dispute and China's India War of 1962

The unresolved Sino-Indian territorial dispute has long been both a

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[23]Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 113.

[24]Document 3:6. Italics added.

[25]J. Mohan Malik, "South Asia in China's Foreign Relations," *Pacifica Review* 13, no. 1 (February 2001): 73-85.

[26]See Jing-dong Yuan, "India's Rise after Pokhran II: Chinese Analyses and Assessments," *Asian Survey* 41, no. 6 (November/December 2001): 978-1001.

cause and an effect of the negative images and attitudes that China and India have held of and toward each other; Zhou's conversations with Nixon are quite revealing in this regard. Recalling the origins of the 1962 war with India, Zhou Enlai noted that "the events actually began in 1959." However, he went on to attribute the war entirely to the U.S.-Soviet summit at Camp David in June 1959 and Khrushchev's unilateral decision to tear up the nuclear agreements between China and the Soviet Union prior to his departure for Camp David. Zhou observed: "After that there were clashes between Chinese and Indian troops in the western part of Sinkiang [Xinjiang, 新疆], the Aksai Chin [阿克賽欽] area, ... India was encouraged by the Soviet Union to attack. We fought them and beat them back, with many wounded. But the TASS News Agency said that China had committed aggression against India." Then Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi took Khrushchev to task for endorsing the Indian version of events. He asked Khrushchev: "Why did you rely on the Indian press over the Chinese press? Wasn't that a case of believing in India more than us, a fraternal country (that is, China)?" Zhou told Nixon that "the TASS Agency account had the effect of encouraging India. And also Neville Maxwell mentioned in the book that in 1962 the Indian government believed what the Russians told them that we, China, would not retaliate against them."[27]

In reality, Zhou's account of the origins of the Sino-Indian War in 1962 as narrated to Nixon and Kissinger is at best subjective and partially correct and at worst a distortion of historical facts or a selective narrative of facts. Zhou was correct in saying that "the events actually began in 1959," but they had little to do with the Camp David summit (held in June

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[27]Discussion here draws on Nixon-Zhou Document 3:4; and Kissinger-Zhou Document 36: 5-6, at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-36.pdf>. Maxwell's *India's China War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970) gave a pro-Beijing account of the 1962 war by an Australian journalist based in India. The major flaw was that Maxwell accepted the official Chinese statements at face value while attributing ulterior motives to the statements and actions of the Indian leadership. Most objective observers concede that both sides bore responsibility for escalating the dispute to the point of open war. See, for example, Vertzberger, *Misperceptions in Foreign Policymaking*; Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis*; and Liu Xuecheng, *The Sino-Indian Border Dispute and Sino-Indian Relations* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994). Liu's book is still banned in China.

1959) or the Soviet decision to renege on its promise to provide China with a nuclear bomb. The origins of the war lay in an event that had occurred three months earlier—in the March 1959 Tibetan uprising which ended with the Dalai Lama's flight into exile in India and the renunciation of the Seventeen-Point Agreement which had "legalized" China's annexation of Tibet in 1951. Zhou, however, cleverly sidestepped the single most important issue of national uprising in Tibet and Mao's subsequent decision to punish Nehru for granting asylum to Tibet's spiritual leader; Mao blamed it all on the Soviet Union apparently to emphasize the common security concerns that Beijing now shared with Washington vis-à-vis Moscow (and New Delhi).

Zhou cited Maxwell[28] in support of his claim that "in 1962 the Indian Government believed what the Russians told them that we, China, would not retaliate against them."[29] However, Zhou forgot to mention that it was not just the Russians who told the Indians so. Chen Yi had himself said so twice, once in response to a question in Karachi. As Steven Hoffman argues, the Indian leadership relied too much on a private assurance given to Defense Minister Krishna Menon by Chen Yi in July 1962 in Geneva that "there may be skirmishes between forces of the two countries along the border, but full-scale hostilities were unthinkable."[30] Zhou was therefore being disingenuous in scapegoating the Soviet Union for encouraging Indian hostilities because he later implied that the real motivation behind the war was China's concern about Tibet.

Zhou himself acknowledged a major reason behind China's decision to up the ante on the border dispute: "We sent three open telegrams to

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[28]A former Singaporean diplomat who accompanied Lee Kuan Yew on his first visit to China told this author that Zhou Enlai (and later his successor, Deng Xiaoping) used to give a copy of Maxwell's *India's China War* to visiting leaders and dignatories. Nixon had read the book (on Kissinger's advice) and when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi held talks with Nixon just before the outbreak of the 1971 war, he said the book provided a very interesting account of the beginning of the war between India and China. Predictably, Nixon told a laughing Zhou that "she didn't react very favorably when I said that." Document 3:3.

[29]Document 3:4.

[30]Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis*, 125.

Nehru asking him to make a *public reply, but he refused. He was so discourteous; he wouldn't even do us the courtesy of replying, so we had no choice but to drive him out.*" Zhou also claimed that "actually the five principles [of peaceful coexistence] were put forward by us, and Nehru agreed. But later on he didn't implement them."[31] Obviously, Nehru had incurred Zhou's wrath for being discourteous and arrogant, and a punitive military action against India, from Beijing's perspective, was a logical step.[32] That is how the Celestial Emperor of the Middle Kingdom had traditionally reacted to the discourteous and arrogant rulers of tributary states and hostile regimes in Chinese history. As John Garver, a long-time observer of China-India relations, points out, this was also the time when "Mao became convinced that the U.S. and India, along with China's erstwhile ally the USSR, were all working together against China... Forceful blows were necessary to foil this anti-China conspiracy."[33]

In his authoritative study on *India and the China Crisis*, Steven Hoffman gives, however, another explanation for Nehru's intransigence and angst over Zhou's negotiating stance. A theme pursued in this book, and one which has largely been ignored in the earlier studies of the China-India conflict, is the importance of Indian nationalism which influenced the Indian leadership's basic worldview and its response to China's demands for territorial concessions from India. He argues that the "Nehru government ... perceived in the Chinese negotiating stance an attempt to denigrate the historical authenticity of the Indian nation."[34] In other words, the view was

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[31]Document 3:2. Italics added.

[32]Many Indian commentaries on the era concede not only that Nehru was exceedingly arrogant but also that Indian decision-making at the time was hardly a model of reason. A retired major general and a respected military historian, D. K. Palit (upon whom Hoffman relies very heavily), began his own book on the 1962 war with these words: "[This book] records the inept handling of political and military affairs by the government and the army during that crisis—so inept that it verged on the bizarre... It is incomprehensible that a government headed by so highly regarded a statesman as Jawaharlal Nehru could have made such gross misjudgements and breaches of established procedure." See D. K. Palit, *War in High Himalayas: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1991), 1-2.

[33]Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 57.

[34]Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis*, 114.

that unlike China, India was an artificial construct put together by the departing British colonialists. That is why "China never understood the psychological dimension of India's handling of the border dispute."[35] Coming as it did soon after India's independence from centuries of colonialism, the Chinese demand for territorial concessions was seen as demeaning and humiliating by Indian nationalists led by Nehru.

When discussing the Sino-Burmese boundary settlement which required China's acceptance of the McMahon Line, Zhou outlined one of the principles of China's boundary settlements: China tended to be more accommodative toward smaller countries than toward big powers. Zhou told Nixon: "The boundary settlement of the Sino-Burmese boundary line was one of mutual accommodation, but actually the result was that Burma gained a bit more, which was reasonable. Since they are a smaller country than us we gave them the benefit of the doubt."[36] It would be misleading to draw the conclusion that China is more likely to make territorial concessions to the smaller countries than to the larger ones, however, because this argument does not account for the border war and armed skirmishes between China and Vietnam that lasted from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, or China's claim over the Spratlys (南沙群島). Clearly there are major factors other than the difference in the size of the country to be dealt with that explain the variation in Chinese border negotiation behavior. Apparently, Beijing's *preference* was to settle borders with smaller and weaker states, and if need be, make territorial concessions to them; at the same time, however, the desire was also to force territorial concessions from larger and stronger states perceived either as threats to China or as China's potential rivals (such as India). Zhou also believed that the two big countries—the Soviet Union and India—were not keen on settlement and were cooperating against China: "They want to leave a pretext so that they can take the opportunity to make provocations against us when they need it." He then let the cat out of the bag by implying that China had provoked

[35]Ibid., 113.
[36]Document 3:25.

border incidents to pressure the Soviet Union to open boundary question negotiations in the late 1960s—a slip which throws new light on China's crisis behavior.[37]

In fact, there are some very interesting parallels between the origins of the Sino-Soviet in the late 1960s and the Sino-Indian border clashes of the early 1960s that deserve critical scrutiny. As regards the 1969 clashes on the Sino-Soviet border, Zhou admitted that the PLA had provoked border incidents in order to pressure the Soviet Union to begin boundary question negotiations in the late 1960s.[38] This contradicts what Neville Maxwell argued in a 1973 article which claimed that the Chinese engaged "only after taking sustained fire from the Russians," and held Moscow responsible for the conflict just as Maxwell had earlier held New Delhi responsible for the Sino-Indian border conflict in the early 1960s.[39] Newly available archival evidence and testimony from Russia, East Germany, and China, however, contradicts Maxwell's account and confirms what Zhou had indirectly hinted at in his conversations with Nixon but was ignored by the president and his national security adviser:[40] the Chinese had initiated the serious armed clashes on the Ussuri River (烏蘇里江) in 1969. Based on interviews with a number of China's Cold War historians, the commander of the Shenyang Military Region during the crisis, and Russian area specialists, Lyle Goldstein's recent study reveals that "in 1968, China began preparations to create a small war on the border... The Soviets were really panicked [because] they were absolutely unprepared... It was a complete surprise [to them]." The clashes were motivated by "Mao's need for an external threat" to both unite the faction-ridden CCP and a country torn

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[37]Ibid., 26.

[38]See William Burr, <*Cold War History*, "Sino-American Relations, 1969: Sino-Soviet Border Conflict and Steps Toward Rapprochement>, at the National Security Archives website.

[39]Neville Maxwell, "The Chinese Account of the 1969 Fighting at Chenpao," *The China Quarterly*, no. 56 (October/December 1973): 730-39; and Maxwell, *India's China War*.

[40]After all, Kissinger and Nixon would not have liked to see the U.S. opening to China tainted by the perception that China was the aggressor on the Ussuri. It was in their interest to portray China as the victim of Soviet aggression.

by the class warfare that the Cultural Revolution had unleashed.[41] This "diversionary theory of conflict," wherein leaders create international conflicts to divert public attention from domestic conflicts, could also in part explain what happened in the early 1960s on the Sino-Indian border. Just as the unprepared Soviets were easily outnumbered by superior and well-trained Chinese forces in 1969, so were the unprepared Indians easily outnumbered and outgunned by well-equipped, well-trained, and battle-hardened Chinese forces in 1962. Unless archival evidence to the contrary is made available on the 1962 clashes, the "diversionary theory" could thus be applied to the Sino-Indian conflict, which came as it did soon after the Great Leap Forward fiasco and Mao's attempts to reassert his control over the party and the government. Significantly, it was the 1962 China-India War which laid the groundwork for new geopolitical alignments in South Asia, with Beijing firmly aligning itself with New Delhi's *bete noire*—Islamabad, and New Delhi tilting initially toward Washington and later aligning itself with Beijing's nemesis—Moscow.

## The 1971 India-Pakistan War

If armed clashes on the Sino-Soviet border in 1969 had prompted Beijing and Washington to set up secret channels of communication, the 1971 India-Pakistan War provided the first instance of Sino-U.S. strategic cooperation and paved the way for a public U.S.-PRC kiss-and-makeup. It was the Nixon administration's decision to tilt U.S. policy toward Islamabad at the height of the 1971 India-Pakistan War which convinced the Chinese leadership of Washington's "seriousness and reliability" as an ally and its commitment to rapprochement.[42] This tilt, engineered secretly by Nixon and Kissinger (who saw India as a Soviet proxy and China as an ally against the Soviet threat), drew widespread opposition, however, within and with-

[41]Lyle J. Goldstein, "Return to Zhenbao Island: Who Started Shooting and Why it Matters," *The China Quarterly*, no. 168 (December 2001): 989, 995.

[42]Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 57-59.

out the Nixon administration. The shift was based partly on the erroneous assumption that Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had the will or the capability to destroy West Pakistan after dismembering its eastern wing; it also was partly an expression of gratitude to Beijing's ally, President Yahya Khan of Pakistan, for playing an important role in facilitating secret communications with China during 1970 and 1971.

Zhou also told Nixon that after the complete rupture in Sino-Soviet relations in 1960, the Chinese used to convey their messages to Moscow (during 1964-65) through Pakistani military ruler Ayub Khan.[43] This is an interesting revelation insofar as it shows that General Yahya Khan was not the first Pakistani leader to act as an intermediary for the Chinese. His predecessor Ayub Khan's services were also used in a similar capacity to keep the channels of communication open with the Soviet Union. General Ayub Khan might have acted as a messenger during the Tashkent Agreement, which was facilitated by Khrushchev after the 1965 India-Pakistan War over Kashmir. This earns Pakistan the unique distinction of having acted as an intermediary for the Chinese in their secret dealings with *both* superpowers at the height of the Cold War—a fact that should make Pakistani diplomacy an object of envy for leader of the "non-aligned" movement and arch-rival, India.

The transcripts reveal that the Chinese Premier was quite impressed with the Pakistanis' military prowess and fighting spirit but was scathing in his criticism of General Yahya Khan's leadership qualities. Zhou told Nixon:

> Yahya really did not lead his troops in East Pakistan well. Even though we assisted with armaments... At the time of the ceasefire, they [the Pakistanis] still had 80,000 troops in East Pakistan. It was not a situation in which they couldn't keep fighting. We know the Pakistanis are good fighters, and the men wanted to keep on. The trouble was the Commanders were terrible—they really just scattered the troops... Yahya should have concentrated his troops to win a victory, and once the Indian side had suffered a defeat they would have stopped because West Bengal was not very secure either ... [with] a force of 40,000 against one Indian division, they would have been able to win and that would

[43]Document 5:2-3.

> have demoralized the Indians... Yahya was a good man, but did not know how to lead an army, how to fight.[44]

Zhou then goes on to refer to Kissinger's secret meeting with China's U.N. Ambassador Huang Hua (黃華) on December 10, 1971 in New York. The remaining part is censored, but the full account is presented in William Burr's *The Kissinger Transcripts*.[45] It was at this meeting that Kissinger provided sensitive intelligence information, derived from reconnaissance satellites, on Soviet military deployments along the Sino-Soviet border.[46] Kissinger told Ambassador Huang (who later visited India as Foreign Minister in 1981) how the White House was sustaining its tilt toward Pakistan via veiled threats to the Soviets, secret requests to Middle Eastern governments to provide military equipment to Pakistan, and instructions to send an aircraft carrier fleet through the Straits of Malacca into the Bay of Bengal "to ensure 'maximum intimidation' of India and the Soviet Union."[47] At this meeting, Huang launched a strong anti-India tirade which led Kissinger to conclude incorrectly that the Chinese were about to enter the conflict as India's military moved in to decimate West Pakistan. Demanding strong condemnation of India, Huang said:

> Because if India, with the aid of the Soviet Union, would be able to have its own way in the subcontinent then there would be no more security to speak of for a lot of other countries, and no peace to speak of. Because that would mean the dismemberment of and the splitting up of a sovereign country and the creation of a new edition of Manchukuo, the Bangladesh... The Soviet Union and India now are progressing along on an extremely dangerous track in the subcontinent. And as we have already pointed out this is a step to encircle China.[48]

Kissinger fully agreed with Huang Hua, saying that "if nothing was done to stop India, then East Pakistan will become a Bhutan and West

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[44]Document 3:7-8.

[45]Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 50-59.

[46]Raymond Garthoff suggests, however, that Kissinger had provided intelligence data to the Chinese as early as during his October 1971 visit to Beijing. See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 262.

[47]Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 43, 47.

[48]Ibid., 53.

Pakistan will become a Nepal, and India with Soviet help would be free to turn its energies elsewhere" [that is, Tibet].[49] Although Huang did not mention Tibet, because "the discussion was about Soviet-Indian collusion to partition other countries, the implication was obvious."[50] Nor had Kissinger forgotten Zhou's warning to India during his secret visit to Beijing five months before: "India is committing aggression against Pakistan. They have also committed aggression against us, too... This was because India had long ago under Nehru adopted an expansionist philosophy... *The turmoil in East Pakistan in a very great way is due to India... If they [the Indians] are bent on provoking such a situation, then we cannot sit idly by.*"[51] Zhou had also "recalled the Chinese defeat of India in 1962 and hinted rather broadly that the same thing could happen again."[52]

It was in this context that Kissinger offered U.S. support to deter the Soviet Union in case China decided to mount an attack on India in support of Pakistan. Kissinger told Huang Hua on December 10, 1971: "[I]f the People's Republic were to consider the situation on the Indian subcontinent a threat to its security, and if it took measures to protect its security, the U.S. would oppose efforts of others [read, the Soviet Union] to interfere with the People's Republic..."[53] This assurance of U.S. support for Chinese intervention in the war was carefully omitted by Kissinger from his memoirs. He later argued that this action had been "the first decision to risk war in the triangular Soviet-Chinese-American relationship."[54] (Fortunately, a week after this meeting, on December 17, Pakistan acquiesced to India's unilateral cease-fire.)

Nixon also confirmed this account by saying: "In December, when

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[49]Ibid., 51.

[50]Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 214; and Kissinger, *White House Years*, 906.

[51]Document 35:6, 11-12, at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-35.pdf>. Italics added.

[52]Kissinger's memorandum on "My Talks with Chou En-lai" to Nixon of July 14, 1971, Document 40:19-20, 22, at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-40.pdf>.

[53]Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 51.

[54]Kissinger, *White House Years*, 909.

the situation was getting very sensitive in the subcontinent—I'm using understatement—I was prepared..."[55] The rest of the statement is blacked out but its content is no longer a secret as it was alluded to in Nixon's memoirs and numerous other works. He was referring to the dispatch of the *USS Enterprise* aircraft carrier to the Bay of Bengal and nuclear coercion if India had continued its advance into West Pakistani territory and if the Soviet Union had not pressured India to halt its aggression after the liberation of Bangladesh. The Chinese were also keeping a close watch on the U.S.-Soviet moves and counter-moves. As Zhou told Nixon: "When your navy ships were moving toward the Indian Ocean they [the USSR] also very quickly sent nuclear subs down from Vladivostok to the Indian Ocean."[56] The next paragraph is blacked out wherein the two sides apparently discussed their support for each other's intimidation of India and the Soviet Union, pressure designed to bring a quick end to the war. Nixon describes himself as a "hard-liner on India" (and this was music to his Chinese hosts' ears), saying "all the Indian decisions were mine··· [though] Dr. Kissinger was a [co-]conspirator with me."[57] Kissinger later admitted in his memoirs: "We also wanted to have forces in place in case the Soviet Union pressured China."[58]

Nixon and Kissinger's handling of the 1971 crisis came in for sharp criticism from several observers who held that the two men had misconstrued Chinese intentions and inflated the Soviet and Indian war objectives.[59] Apparently, Kissinger did not realize that the Chinese leaders had a tendency to engage in hyperbole and high-pitched rhetoric whenever

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[55]Document 3:21.

[56]Ibid., 39.

[57]Ibid., 22.

[58]Kissinger, *White House Years*, 905.

[59]See the works of former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Christopher Van Hollen, who presented a strong rebuttal to many of Kissinger's contentions in his "The Tilt Policy Revisited: Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics and South Asia," *Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (April 1980): 339-61. Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power* (Summit, 1983), challenged Kissinger's thesis that an aggressive Indian policy backed by the Soviet Union threatened American interests, including the U.S. opening to China and the prospects for American-Soviet détente.

China was perceived as weak and vulnerable. Caught in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution and facing a hostile Soviet Union on its northern borders, China lacked the capability (and intention, many would argue) to intervene militarily on Pakistan's behalf.[60] Raymond Garthoff captures the essence of the White House decision-making in 1971:

> The war involved multiple and complex considerations, including several important ones stemming from triangular diplomacy, but Kissinger and Nixon magnified the inherent complexity—and adverse consequences—by fundamental errors in their reading of the situation and their responses... The underlying fallacy in Kissinger and Nixon's thinking throughout the crisis is that they persisted in assessing Soviet aims in terms of presumed Indian aims, and vice versa. Moreover, they attributed maximum offensive aims to both.[61]

The transcripts, however, reveal that much like the Americans, the Chinese also interpreted developments in terms of their prejudgments. Therefore, a more plausible explanation is that given Nixon and Kissinger's main preoccupation with China's role within the framework of the emerging triangular diplomacy, the two might have been overly influenced by Chinese rhetoric, and their biases and prejudices toward India and the Soviet Union might have led to a misinterpretation of intelligence reports.

As John Garver notes, Mao's view of India was that of a neo-colonialist regime propped up by the Anglo-American imperialists and/or the Soviet revisionists as a way of encircling China, and that the Soviet-supported Indian intervention in Bangladesh could serve as a precedent for possible intervention in Tibet.[62] While India could create difficulties in Tibet, the Soviet Union could pose problems for China's only Muslim majority province of Xinjiang, formerly known as East Turkestan. Zhou himself acknowledged China's nightmare scenario in February 1972: "The worst possibility is what I told Dr. Kissinger ... the eventuality that you all would attack China—the Soviet Union comes from the north, Japanese and

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[60]The only action the Chinese took to remind the Indians of the Chinese military presence and potential was to initiate some military alert measures and move forces closer to the line of actual control along the Chinese-Indian border from December 8-16, 1971. See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 316.

[61]Ibid., 295, 300-301.

[62]See Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 199.

the U.S. from the east, and India into China's Tibet."[63] Zhou recalled the conversation that Soviet Foreign Minister had held with Japanese leader Fukuda regarding the possibility within the next five years of a greater conflict between China and the Soviet Union than there was at Zhenbao Island (珍寶島): "Perhaps they want to do as they did in Bangladesh, and maybe they will try to create a Republic of Turkestan..."[64]

To allay Beijing's concerns about any future U.S.-Soviet deals detrimental to China's interests, Nixon and Kissinger also repeatedly assured Zhou that "we will make no, have no understandings with the Soviet Union... [without] informing your government."[65] Both sides also agreed to coordinate their stance on the recognition of Bangladesh and delay it as long as possible because, as Zhou stated:

> Both of us owe something to Yahya, although he didn't show much statesmanship in leading his country, for bringing the link between our two countries... As for us, our recognition of Bangladesh will be later than yours and we may be the last. But that does not mean that we will refuse to have any contact whatsoever with an area with so huge a population... *Islamic countries haven't recognized Bangladesh, and we must respect their views.*[66]

This stance indicated Beijing's recognition of the need to keep the Islamic world on its side. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Islamic countries emerged as the major buyers of Chinese conventional and non-conventional weaponry. The transcripts show the Chinese government and Nixon administration's reluctance/failure to judge the issue of the military's brutal repression in East Pakistan purely on its own merits,[67] that is, without looking at it through the prism of the U.S.-Soviet-China Cold War rivalry.

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[63]Document 2:18. Zhou Enlai also expressed regrets over Chiang Kai-shek's decision to grant independence to Mongolia.

[64]See <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/nixzhou/15-01.htm> [hereafter Document 5], 4.

[65]Document 3:22.

[66]Ibid., 7, 11. Italics added.

[67]Examples of which include the military's refusal to transfer power to the popularly elected leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; ten million refugees fleeing to India; and thousands massacred by West Pakistani troops before the Indians began arming resistance forces. See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 319.

In their very first day of discussions, both Nixon and Zhou agreed that "a critical area like South Asia and India cannot be discussed without evaluating the policy of the Soviet Union toward that area. And the same can be said of the whole problem of arms control."[68] As Nixon explained: "One reason we took a strong stand on the India-Pakistan matter was to discourage Soviet adventuristic policy in a place like the Middle East." Nixon then offered to share intelligence regarding Soviet force deployment on the Sino-Soviet border. The whole paragraph is censured except the last line: "When we took a hard line against India and for Pakistan, we were speaking not just to India or Pakistan but also—and we made them well aware of it—to the Soviet Union."[69]

From Nixon's perspective, threatening and intimidating India and the Soviet Union during the December 1971 War was meant to send a signal to the Soviets to refrain from helping Washington's adversaries in regional or internal conflicts in the Third World. Equally importantly, the pressure was also meant to demonstrate U.S. reliability to the Chinese as a prelude to Nixon's talks with Zhou and Mao.[70] Interestingly, the transcripts reveal that Zhou was considering restoring ambassador-level ties (severed since the 1962 war) with India in 1971 (that is, just before the Bangladesh crisis erupted) and the Indian government was informed of this move. However, the Sino-U.S. rapprochement and the Bangladesh War in 1971 served to delay the normalization of Sino-Indian relations by almost a decade, though ambassador-level ties were eventually restored in 1976. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, India's close ties with the Soviet Union as well as China's military alliance with Pakistan and quasi-alliance with the United States (forged after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979) hampered the development of Sino-Soviet, Sino-Indian, and Indian-American ties.

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[68]See <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/nixzhou/11-01.htm> [hereafter, Document 1], 9.

[69]Document 2:11.

[70]Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, 15. "In the minds of Kissinger and Nixon the publicized tilt toward Pakistan was but a natural corollary of the tilt toward China. The China tilt skewed the entire diplomacy of the United States toward South Asia," writes Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 320.

The week-long visit in February 1972 was largely successful in putting the tentative Sino-U.S. rapprochement on more solid ground via formal agreements on "global and regional hegemony" (code-words at the time for the Soviet Union and India), Japan, and Taiwan. It was a Kissingerian exercise in classic balance-of-power diplomacy, with two powers pooling their resources together to meet the perceived common security threat emanating from the Soviet Union. As Kissinger advised Nixon, it was the pragmatism of Mao and Zhou that led them to deal with one "barbarian" nation (the United States) in order to control another "barbarian" nation (the Soviet Union). From Nixon's perspective, he was not interested in Red China or the Maoist version of communism. Rather, China's geostrategic location and its ability to pin down half of the Soviet Red Army in the Far East (so as to present Moscow with multiple security concerns on several fronts) was what prompted Nixon to undertake significant policy shifts on Taiwan, India, and Japan. The Nixon-Kissinger duo did a superb job competing with each other in humoring Mao and Zhou by denigrating the Indians and Russians. If Zhou's narration of events leading up to the 1962 India-China War and the 1969 Sino-Soviet clashes was full of half-truths and misrepresentation of historical facts, it was so because his primary objective at the talks was to emphasize the commonality of interests between the United States and China vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and India. Archival documents illustrate that there was strong opposition to the U.S.-China détente from what Zhou and Nixon described as an "an unholy alliance of the far right, pro-Chiang Kai-shek, pro-Japan elements, the pro-Soviet left, and pro-Indian left."[71] In their zeal to counter the exaggerated fears of the perceived Soviet threat, both had decided to put the Taiwan

[71]Document 2:6, 11. "One cause ... was that Kissinger and Nixon were virtually—sometimes literally—the only policymakers. And Nixon was almost wholly dependent on Kissinger's sometimes unique reading of the facts and their implications. Kissinger misread Soviet and Indian intentions and Chinese expectations," observes Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 319.

issue on the backburner, with the U.S. making significant concessions to the Chinese.

The two sides not only used the Soviet and Indian threats to find common ground but also emphasized their common interests vis-à-vis Japan. Emphasizing that "both China and the U.S. have had very difficult experiences with Japanese militarism," Nixon expressed the fear that should the United States pull out of Japan, Japan could develop nuclear weapons.[72] He then offered to take on the responsibility of protecting China's interests vis-à-vis Japan and India. On several occasions, Nixon conceded the primacy of Chinese interests in the Indian subcontinent ("we believe your interest here is greater than ours"). An indication of China's desire for a role in South Asia was given to Kissinger by Zhou in July 1971: "Of course, when one speaks of the South Asian subcontinent, this means mainly India and Pakistan. However, China also has a part there."[73] In real policy terms, this statement signaled to the Chinese an American acknowledgement that South Asia was China's sphere of influence.[74]

Sudden, dramatic changes in major power alignments are bound to have unintended consequences for other actors in the international system. The Sino-American rapprochement in the early 1970s was no exception. The state of Sino-U.S. relations has always heavily influenced India's foreign policy orientation. For instance, President Nixon's courting of Mao's China in 1971 heightened New Delhi's sense of international isolation in regard to India's looming war against Pakistan; pushed non-aligned India firmly into the Soviet embrace leading to the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Peace, and Cooperation in August 1971 as a guarantee against Chinese military intervention; and later influenced New Delhi's decision to carry out a nuclear test in May 1974 to counter any future U.S. or Chinese nuclear blackmail.[75] President Bill Clinton's attempts to estab-

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[72]Document 2:12.

[73]Burr, *Henry Kissinger's Secret Trip to China*, at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-35.pdf> Document 35:11-12.

[74]Document 2:11.

[75]According to Garthoff: "As early as July 1971, Nixon and Kissinger in secret policymaking

lish a U.S.-China strategic partnership (or "China first" policy, albeit short-lived) with Jiang Zemin's (江澤民) China in 1997-98 seemed, moreover, to have encouraged India to openly advance its nuclear and ballistic capabilities in May 1998.[76]

The tragedy of great power politics is that the more things change, the more they remain the same. Zhou derided the Soviet support for the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) in 1963 as an attempt "to exert pressure on us at a time when we didn't have nuclear weapons."[77] Three decades later, India was leveling the same accusation at China, describing Beijing's support for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) being made contingent on India's signature on the treaty as an attempt by China to "strip India of its nuclear weapons capability."[78] Recalling the 1969 Sino-Soviet border clashes, Zhou had complained to Nixon that "though a so-called hot line existed between the Soviet Union and China, it had become cold because the Kremlin hadn't called us. Their line existed, but they didn't use it."[79] Thirty years later, following the accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999, it was President Clinton's turn to complain that the Chinese did not use the hot-line between the White House and Zhongnanhai (中南海) either, as his repeated calls to President Jiang Zemin went unanswered. In another interesting parallel, Zhou had dismissed the Soviet anger over the U-2 spy plane incident that occurred over Soviet territory as "a very good pretext."[80] Surely, Beijing would not react lightly to any suggestion by some hawks in the Pentagon that, by the same token, the Chinese anger over the EP-3 spy plane incident in April 2001—which

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sessions referred to the president's desire to 'tilt toward Pakistan'." Moreover, a few weeks before the signing of the treaty, "Kissinger had advised India's Ambassador L. K. Jha that India would not receive American support in case of Chinese intervention." See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 298-300; and Hersh, *The Price of Power*, 452-53.

[76]Mohan Malik, "Nuclear Proliferation in Asia: The China Factor," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 53, no. 1 (April 1999): 31-41.

[77]Document 3:35.

[78]See Jaswant Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 5 (1998): 41-52; and Malik, "Nuclear Proliferation in Asia," 33.

[79]Document 3:27.

[80]Ibid., 34.

occurred in international airspace, not over Chinese territory—was nothing but "a very good pretext" as well.

In 1972, Nixon was telling Zhou that "a strong China is in the interests of world peace at this point... a strong China can help provide the balance of power in this key part of the world."[81] Three decades later, concerned with the rise of a Chinese behemoth following the collapse of the Soviet Union, another Republican President, George W. Bush, conveyed a similar message to India's Prime Minister Vajpayee: "A strong India can help provide the balance of power in the entire Asian region." *Realpolitik* rules. For India, which has always regarded China as a strategic adversary, the Bush administration's characterization of China as a "strategic competitor" rather than as a strategic partner was a positive development. Understandable is that China has now become as apprehensive of the Indo-U.S. rekindling of ties as India and the Soviet Union were then of Sino-U.S. rapprochement.[82] In other words, in a complete reversal of roles, it is now Beijing's turn to fear the worst: that India could play the same role in the U.S. security calculus vis-à-vis China (if the Sino-U.S. relationship deteriorates into a new cold war) that China had played against the former Soviet Union from 1971 to 1989.[83]

Many in the United States believe that India's emergence as a major power serves U.S. interests by ensuring the existence of yet another countervailing power in Asia—along with China and Japan—that prevents the domination of the region by any one power.[84] Some observers in India's strategic circles see the emerging Indo-U.S. quasi-alliance as providing an

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[81]Document 2:31.

[82]Ren Xu, Qian Feng, and Fang Hua, "Mei Ri dou lalong Indu: Genben mudi shi ezhi Zhongguo" (America and Japan rope in India: Their basic objective is to contain China), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), April 30, 2001, 4; Zhang Wenmu, "Meiguo de shiyou diyuan zhanlue yu Zhongguo Xizang Xinjiang diqu anquan" (U.S. petroleum-geostrategy and the regional security of China's Tibet and Xinjiang), *Zhanlue yu guanli* (Strategy and Management) 27, no. 2 (1998): 100-104; and J. Mohan Malik, "China Edgy over Clinton's India Visit," *The Pioneer*, March 2, 2000, 8.

[83]Jian Hua, "The United States, Japan want to rope in India which cherishes the dream of becoming a major power," *Ta Kung Pao* (Hong Kong), June 4, 2001, trans. in *FBIS-China*.

[84]Z. Khalilzad et al., *The United States and Asia: Toward a New U.S. Strategy and Force Posture* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 2001), 203-31.

opportunity for "payback" to China. As G. Parthasarthy, former ambassador to Pakistan and Burma, has stated: "Whether it was the Bangladesh conflict of 1971, or in the Clinton-Jiang Declaration in the aftermath of our nuclear tests, China has never hesitated to use its leverage with the Americans to undermine our security."[85] However, there is as yet no indication that the Indo-U.S. rapprochement is motivated by Washington's desire to pin down on the India-China border half of the PLA's divisions. At a minimum, New Delhi would want to use its strategic ties with Washington to bolster India's position in its dealings with China. The détente between the world's most powerful and largest democracies *may have the potential* to prove more durable than Sino-U.S. rapprochement. This is due not only to shared security interests (with regard to China, Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, missile defense, and the safety of vital sea lanes of communication), but also to the growing economic synergy and shared values of pluralism, rule of law, democracy, and human rights. A number of developments will have to occur, however, before India will be able to play a significant role in the eventual outcome of the U.S.-China rivalry in Asia; these include a serious deterioration in Sino-Indian and Sino-American relations, a decline in U.S. support for Pakistan, and growth in India's economy.[86] The logic of geopolitics also dictates that the United States would want to circumvent the formation of a tripartite alliance (suggested first by former Russian Premier Primakov in 1993) comprised of Russia, China, and India. Such an axis by the three continental powers of Eurasia would certainly threaten American dominance in the world. Should Russia and China (with the backing of Germany and/or France) formalize an alliance to counter the U.S.-led bloc, a strong alliance with India would then be a significant asset to the United States in offsetting Sino-Russian power and influence in Eurasia.[87]

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[85]G. Parthasarthy, "Tomorrow's Security-Missile Defence," *The Pioneer*, May 10, 2001.

[86]G. Friedman, "India and the Great Eurasian Game," *Stratfor.com*, June 4, 2001, <H:\India and the Great Eurasian Game.htm>.

[87]Ibid.; Stratfor, "U.S. and India Seek to Boost Military Relations," *Stratfor.com*, May 30, 2001, <H:\US and India Seek to Boost Military Relations.htm>.

By the time President George W. Bush visited Beijing in late February 2002 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Nixon's visit to China in February 1972, the context, tone, and nature of the Sino-U.S. relationship had undergone dramatic change. Though Beijing still wishes to cooperate with Washington to contain New Delhi, the unfortunate reality is that there is greater conflict of interests between China and the United States than between India and the United States. The Bush administration seems committed to encouraging India's involvement in a wider Asian security system to balance a rising China and declining Japan. China's initial optimism that new Sino-U.S.-Pakistan triangular cooperation against terrorism after September 11th would wean Washington away from New Delhi has turned out to be wishful thinking: Bush administration officials have assured India that America's intensifying alliance with Pakistan would not come at India's expense.[88] If anything, the twin threats of terrorism and WMD proliferation have strengthened the American commitment to building stronger relations, including defense ties with South Asia's preeminent power. In the post-September 11th period, Beijing sees Washington as taking advantage of the War on Terrorism to expand its diplomatic influence and military presence all around China's periphery.[89] Seen from Beijing's perspective, the recent pro-U.S. tilt of China's "strategic partner" Russia; the softening of the Russian position on missile defense (which

[88]To old-timers, the U.S.-Pakistani-Chinese cooperation on Afghanistan in the immediate aftermath of September 11 attacks was reminiscent of an earlier confluence of interests—also played out in Afghanistan a decade ago to fight occupying Soviet forces. In Beijing, there were great expectations of a sharp downturn in Indo-U.S. relations because in many ways what happens on the Indian subcontinent is unavoidably a zero-sum game, and China and Pakistan's new relationship with the United States did affect India negatively. For details, see Mohan Malik, "China, Pakistan, and India: Nervous Neighbours," *The World Today* 58, no. 10 (October 2002): 20-23.

[89]The U.S. military expansion post-9/11 seriously disturbs and undercuts the pattern of cooperation that China had worked hard to establish over the last decade with Russia and like-minded Central, South, and Southeast Asian states over such issues as energy development, economic cooperation, terrorism, and building an anti-U.S. coalition, especially with the purpose of undermining America's position as a global power. For Chinese perspectives on Asian security post-September 11, 2001, see J. Mohan Malik, "Dragon on Terrorism: Assessing China's Tactical Gains and Strategic Losses After 11 September," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24, no. 2 (August 2002): 252-93.

Beijing still opposes); growing U.S. strategic cooperation with India; the U.S. military presence in Pakistan, the Philippines, and Indonesia; and greater security profile by Japan are all unwelcome developments. In their talks with Kissinger and Nixon, Mao and Zhou had professed apprehension over the possibility that the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and India might one day collaborate to threaten China. To some strategic analysts in Beijing, this nightmare scenario could become a reality in this post-September 11th world if appropriate counter-measures are not taken.[90] Dramatic changes in the regional and international strategic environments post-Cold War demonstrate the triangular nature of the U.S.-China-India relationship as well as why this triangle is so "tangled." Any U.S. tilt toward India is likely to prompt the Chinese to further tighten their embrace of India's smaller neighbors, thereby further exacerbating India's security dilemma. As in the past, major powers continue to compete, cooperate, clash, and align with each other in various permutations and combinations.

## Change and Continuity

Identifying some key themes from Mao and Zhou's conversations with Nixon and Kissinger that remain constant in Sino-Indian relationship, this section seeks to provide policy-relevant analysis as to how past events and perceptions may affect present and future developments in China-India relations. There are a number of continuities between the past and the present such as *the high degree of mutual suspicion and distrust, the unresolved border conflict*, and *the highly competitive nature of the Sino-Indian relationship*. If anything, the gulf between the two countries—in terms of their perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of and toward each other—has widened over the last thirty years. True, there has been a dramatic increase in Sino-Indian bilateral exchanges at the political, economic, military, and cultural levels—including high-level visits at regular intervals

[90]Ibid.

and an overall improvement in the rhetoric and atmospherics. However, Sino-Indian ties remain fragile, unstable, and as vulnerable as ever to sudden deterioration as a result of misperceptions, misconceptions, accidents, and eruptions of unresolved issues. As a recent study points out: "Few if any of China's strategic thinkers seem to hold warm or positive views of India for China's future."[91]

Chinese leaders and officials in the early twenty-first century remain as contemptuous of India's socioeconomic achievements and as dismissive of New Delhi's claims of being "the world's largest democracy" as were Mao and Zhou in the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, in a recent meeting with American academics, Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) dismissed as meaningless all talk of learning from India's democratic experience, describing India as "a tribal democracy" whose long-term existence was far from a certainty.[92] A powerful section of the Chinese national security bureaucracy continues to entertain doubts, moreover, about the prospects of India's survival as a nation-state over the long term, seeing it as a "soft state characterized by abject poverty, religious and linguistic cleavages, and regional faultlines." They also caution against any initiative—such as Chinese support for India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council—that will augment India's power.[93] Much like Zhou, his successors are uncomfortable with India's "great power dreams" (大國夢, *daguomeng*), especially the ultra-nationalist view of India's history propounded by the BJP-led nationalist forces.[94] There exists in the Chinese mind a deep

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[91]Andrew Scobell, "'Cult of Defense' and 'Great Power Dreams': The Influence of Strategic Culture on China's Relationship with India," in *South Asia in 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances*, ed. Michael R. Chambers (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2002), 342. Also see Jairam Ramesh, "The Dragon and the Cow," *India Today*, January 28, 2002, 41.

[92]Conversation with an American academic, January 2001. Similar views are often expressed by Chinese diplomats and policy analysts at various forums.

[93]Michael Pillsbury, "Japan and India: Dangerous Democracies," in *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, by Michael Pillsbury (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, January 2000), 70-73; and Scobell, "'Cult of Defense' and 'Great Power Dreams'," 343.

[94]See Chen Tieyuan, "People Are Concerned over India's 'Dream of Becoming a Great Power'," *Zhongguo qingnian bao* (China Youth Daily), May 8, 2001, trans. in *FBIS-CHI*;

distrust of India—with the converse also holding true. Bilateral relations remain stymied by a paucity of parallel interests, are dogged by nationalism on both sides, and are marred by conflicting worldviews and divergent interests. In fact, "Given the negative image of India held by many strategic thinkers in China, the warming in relations between Beijing and New Delhi that has occurred since May 1998" is described by one observer as "remarkable... [and] quite surprising."[95] Any substantive change in the India-China bilateral relationship in the foreseeable future, however, seems highly unlikely because "beneath the diplomatic niceties and apparent desire for cordial interaction lurks the strong negative images Chinese hold of India (and vice versa)."[96] Chinese leaders and India-watchers also remain skeptical about India's economic reforms, believing that India's fractious polity will continue to limit its economic and military potential. Others want to hedge their bets by strengthening the China-Pakistan-Burma axis, however, so as to contain India if it indeed manages to emerge as a powerful economic and military power.[97] They believe that India's rise is not in China's interests because acceptance of South Asia as India's sphere of influence would undermine China's role and stature as the preeminent power in Asia.[98]

The unresolved territorial dispute and the unending blame-game on the origins of the 1962 war is the second most important issue in Sino-

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Shao Zhiyong, "India's Big Power Dream," *Beijing Review*, April 12, 2001, 10; and Malik, "South Asia in China's Foreign Relations." Many Chinese strategists believe that "India possesses an ambitious, belligerent, and expansionist strategic culture," writes Scobell, "'Cult of Defense' and 'Great Power Dreams'," 342.

[95]Scobell, "'Cult of Defense' and 'Great Power Dreams'," 347.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Even in the information technology's (IT) software sector, most Chinese are contemptuous of India's growth prospects over the long term, believing that just as they left India behind in the nuclear arena (where India had an edge in the 1950s), they would be able to supercede India in the IT software sector as well. See "We Will Defeat India in Software Battle: China," *Sifynews.com*, March 10, 2002; Ye Zhengjia, "Buru 21 shiji de Yindu" (India enters the twenty-first century), *International Studies* (English edition) 61, no. 3 (July 1996): 20; and Hua Biyun, "Indu lizheng chengwei xia shiji de jingji daguo" (India: Striving to be an economic power in the next century), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (Contemporary International Relations) 75, no. 1 (January 1996): 21.

[98]Pillsbury, "Japan and India: Dangerous Democracies," 70-73.

Indian relations. While the Chinese settled their boundary disputes with Russia (with the exception of two islands in the Ussuri River) and the three Soviet successor states in Central Asia in the mid- to late-1990s, the prospects of a negotiated settlement of the Sino-Indian border dispute in the near future seem, however, remote. While Chinese leaders counsel patience in resolving the boundary dispute "left over from history," Indians want the dispute to be resolved expeditiously and "not left to history again." The Chinese formulation that "the border dispute with India will be resolved when the conditions are ripe" is interpreted by the Indian side to mean "when the overall military and economic balance of power has shifted in China's favor."[99] A major complicating factor in the Sino-Indian equation is that tensions caused by the territorial dispute have been compounded by rivalry between the two giants for power and influence in Asia. China cannot, moreover, brush aside third-party (i.e., its ally, Pakistan's) interests in the Sino-Indian territorial dispute.[100] This was not the case with the settlement of China's territorial boundaries with Russia or Vietnam. A resolution of the Sino-Indian border dispute would lead to the deployment of India's military assets on the India-Pakistan border, thereby tilting the military balance decisively in India's favor, much to Pakistan's disadvantage. This, in turn, would deprive Beijing of powerful leverage in its relations with Pakistan and undermine its old strategy of keeping India under strategic pressure on two fronts, particularly by creating border incidents on the India-China frontier whenever the India-Pakistan border flares up so as to assist Beijing's "all-weather friend" Pakistan. The fear that India will turn its "attention and energies to China's Tibet after subjugating Pakistan and other smaller South Asian neighbors" (as Zhou Enlai and Huang Hua

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[99]P. Sawhney, "Quiet as Gunpowder," *The Pioneer*, November 21, 2002; A. K. Joseph, "India, China Fail to Exchange Border Maps of Western Sector," *Rediff.com*, June 19, 2002 <H:\India, China fail to exchange border maps.htm>; and R. Datta, "China May Not Be Keen to Solve LAC Issue," *The Pioneer*, July 30, 2001.

[100]In an ever-expanding notion of "forward defense," fifty years ago China did not feel secure if Tibet was not secure and under Beijing's control. Now China does not feel secure if Pakistan and Burma are not under Beijing's influence and control. See John W. Garver, "The Future of the Sino-Pakistani Entente Cordiale," in Chambers, *South Asia in 2020*, 385-447.

told Kissinger) permeates Chinese thinking about India and has been one of the key elements of China's South Asia policy. The net result is that the 4,004-kilometer frontier—one of the longest interstate borders in the world—remains the only one not defined, let alone demarcated, on maps or delineated on the ground.

Finally, as in the past, China-India relations continue to be characterized more by rivalry, competition, and containment than by cooperation and engagement. Both China and India are forging new, offensive military strategies underpinned by growing economies and expanding defense budgets and are seeking new allies in Asia. Both continue to monitor closely and attempt to counteract each other's activities to expand influence and gain advantage in the wider Asian region. Reversing its past official stand that India's "Look East" policy (first launched in the early 1990s) had nothing to do with any threat or competition from China, Indian Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee in November 2002 publicly acknowledged that there is a "healthy competition" between India and China. This statement indicates that India is going to adopt a pro-active strategy to enhance military and economic cooperation with "China-wary nations" in Southeast and East Asia—Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Australia.[101] India's "Look East" policy clashes directly with long-term Chinese objectives and interests in Asia. There seems to be little give-and-take between the two Asian giants. As in the past, Indian and Chinese leaders continue to talk at, rather than to, each other. As in the case of Sino-U.S. ties, Sino-Indian competitive tendencies rooted in geopolitics are unlikely to be easily offset or overcome, even by growing economic links.

In short, the Nixon-Zhou transcripts reveal as much as they conceal and there is reason to believe that theirs may not be the last word on this subject. Like most of the existing literature on this subject, these conversations illuminate elite attitudes and perceptions in Washington and Beijing during the early 1970s and how these shaped U.S. and Chinese policies

[101]N. Kumar, "India, China Competitors: Defines PM," *The Indian Express*, November 9, 2002, 1; and Manoj Joshi, "India Reaching Out to China-Wary Nations," *The Times of India*, January 10, 2001, 1.

toward South Asia. Recent reports hold that India's Defense Ministry has finally recommended releasing into the public domain the official history of the 1962 border war with China and the 1971 India-Pakistan War. Hopefully, the official account will further enhance our understanding of the key dynamics underlying India's relations with China and the United States and illuminate key events in the lead up to the wars of 1962 and 1971. One also hopes that Chinese archives and perhaps the memoirs of former Chinese officials may someday provide insights as to why the Chinese reacted the way they did. For that account, however, we have to wait until a democratic regime comes to power in Beijing which is willing to provide foreign scholars free access to its classified party and state archives. Until then, Zhou's conversations with Nixon represent a second best, but nevertheless a very important, source of insight on the roots of Chinese policy toward South Asia in general and India in particular. Despite dramatic changes in the domestic and international contexts since the early 1970s, little seems to have changed in Chinese attitudes toward and perceptions of India and vice-versa.